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NEWS RELEASE

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Nov. 22, 1996

UM'S "PEAS" PROGRAM TAKES TO THE FIELD TO HELP NEEDY FAMILIES

MISSOULA --

This spring, The University of Montana—Missoula is launching a new interdisciplinary internship program that combines hands-on horticulture with the opportunity to help feed low-income families.

Students in the Program in Ecological Agriculture and Society, or PEAS, will grow organic produce with and for low-income Missoulians as part of the Garden City Harvest Project. PEAS will begin spring semester and continue through fall, complementing the internship service with lectures on varied topics, said PEAS faculty adviser Deborah Slicer, associate professor of philosophy.

The course, open to students in all departments, covers the full Rocky Mountain growing season and focuses on the values and social aspects of food production, Slicer said. Students may earn up to 12 credits by taking all three units of PEAS -- spring semester, summer session and fall semester -- or they can opt to take the course during just one of two of the terms. The hands-on portion of PEAS, the internship, lasts from late February through mid-October, while the accompanying lecture series runs throughout each term.

Interest in PEAS has been very strong, Slicer said, especially considering that the recently developed offering is not listed in the spring semester class schedule. Ten students had signed up for PEAS by Friday, Nov. 22, she said, and it is likely the course will reach its maximum enrollment of 25 by the time spring semester starts in late January.

The PEAS program will be directed by Josh Slotnick, whose local business, Clark Fork Organics, hosted a small pilot program last summer. Lectures will feature UM faculty members

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from various departments. Professors from sociology, philosophy, forestry, international programs, environmental studies and biology are currently involved in the project.

PEAS participants will learn a wide range of marketable horticultural skills. Beginning in late February, students will learn seed propagation, transplanting, vegetable crop culture and fertility management. During the 10-week summer session, students will tackle plant maintenance, organic weed and pest management, irrigation, harvesting and post-harvest care of produce. In the fall, students will practice season-extension techniques, plant cover crops and harvest storage vegetables.

The interdisciplinary lecture series, available separately for one credit per semester, will focus on a different topic area each term. The spring series, offered as Environmental Studies 495, will explore the social, economic, political and historical aspects of agriculture. Summer lectures will concentrate on such topics as soil science and plant pathologies, while the fall lecture series will focus on the ethics and literature of agriculture.

PEAS is offered in conjunction with Missoula's Garden City Harvest Project, which will develop four acres near Fort Missoula into a garden to provide food for low-income Missoulians. The garden will be worked by PEAS students, the families who will receive the food, and volunteer crews who perform community service in return for state assistance.

The internship can be taken through any academic department, with departmental approval, Slicer said. Students interested in the internship should complete an internship "learning agreement" form, available through the Cooperative Education office, then contact Slicer at 243-2527.

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